DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 178 937 CS 205 283

AUTHOR Comprone, Joseph J.
TITLE Using Problem-Solving as a Method of Developing Sequenced-Assignments in a Writing About Fiction and Film Class.
PUB DATE Nov 78
NOTE 13p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (68th, Kansas City, MO, November 23-25, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary); Discovery Learning; *Inquiry Training; *Literary Analysis; *Problem Solving; *Questioning Techniques; Teaching Techniques; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Composition Process; *Heuristics

ABSTRACT

A series of 13 questions is offered for sequencing student writing activities according to a problem solving model of the composing process. The questions are organized in a cyclical framework for approaching any problem solving task that writing students may face. The questions fall into four progressively developed categories, including articulation of the problem, defining goals, developing a procedure for solving the problem, and evaluating the problem/solution with prescribed criteria. A sequence of writing assignments based on the short story "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" by Conrad Aiken, shows one way of using the questions to help students develop personalized methods of intellectual discovery as they develop writing skill. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED178937

Using Problem-Solving as a Method of Developing Sequenced-Assignments in a Writing About Fiction and Film Class

JOSEPH J. COMPRONE, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky

Level: This sequence of assignments and the theory upon which they are based would be suitable to composition courses in the later years of high school and the early years of college. Both the model assignments and the heuristic theory upon which they are based would also provide useful information for teachers at the secondary and college level who are teaching literature courses in which critical writing is required and both printed and film versions of stories are used.

Author's Summary of Theoretical Background: This sequence of assignments is premised upon the following three insights into the composing process of students, gleaned from the research and writing of experimenters and theorists such as Janet Emig (The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders, NCTE, 1971) and Peter Elbow (Writing Without Teachers, Oxford, 1973) on the composing habits of students and professional writers, Richard Young, Alton Becker and Kenneth Pike (Rhetoric: Discovery and Change, Harcourt Brace, 1970) on problem-solving and composition, Kenneth Burke (A Rhetoric of Motives, Prentic-Hall, 1952 and Language as Symbolic Action, University of California Press, 1966) on writings on the pentad, and Frank D'Angelo (Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric, Winthrop, 1972) on work on the discovery of form through classical and contemproary models of invention.

1. Learning to write is not a linear process in which students learn one skill at a time in piecemeal fashion. Rather the Process of writing is, as in thinking, a recursive or cyclical process in which students must direct and control very complex

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joseph J. Comprone

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

CS 205283

patterns of thought with proven methods of inquiry. Studying written products will not, then, insure that students will master the process through which experienced writers produce those products. This particular insight is based primarily on research into the composing process, spearheaded by Young, Emig, Janice Lauer ("Heuristics and Composition," College Composition and Communication, December, 1970), Elbow, and others.

2. If, as research in the composing process has suggested, writing must be taught as process, then many of the traditional models for organizing courses and units within courses around particular linguistic and rhetorical skills (particular kinds of sentences and paragraphs or particular common errors for example) must be replaced by courses and units that place these skills into a naturalistic learning context in which students follow the natural stages of composing and the cognitive development associated with each stage. Recent practical work based on theoretical research into the composing process that suggests methods of arranging writing exercises through time in ways that correspond with the different stages of composing (prewriting, writing, rewriting, and the conceptual acts most common to each stage) are beginning to suggest ways in which teachers can have their classes focus on process rather than product. (See specifically the work of Frances Christensen, Notes Toward A New Rhetoric, Harper and Row, 1967 and the Christensen Rhetoric Program; the work of Frank D'Angelo, Process and Thought in Composition, Winthrop, 1977,

and the approaches of innovative teachers such as Ken Macrorie, Telling Writing, Hayden, 1970 and William Coles, Composing: A Self-Creating Process, Hayden, 1974.) Both these latter texts creatively direct the thinking processes of students as they examine and write about immediately-perceived experience.

3. The area of research most directly capable of combining research into the composing process with the planning of particular courses and units is one loosely defined as heuristics. A heuristic is a method of directed inquiry which provides a controlled line of discovery without dictating content. Heuristic models can be and have been constructed from methods of inquiry in any discipline, field, or combination of disciplines and fields: the classical, rhetorical topics of invention have been proposed as the premises behind heuristic sequences of questions by Richard Larson ("Discovery through Questioning: A Plan for Teaching Rhetorical Invention," College English, November, 1968) and by Frank D'Angelo in A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric; problem-solving has been posed as a sequence of questions capable of controlling and directing the composing process by Larson ("Problem-Solving, Composing, and Liberal Education," College English, March, 1972) and by Richard Young, et al (Rhetoric: Discovery and Change) and Linda Flower and John Hayes ("Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process," College English, December, 1977); the dramatistic approach to literature of Kenneth Burke has been suggested as a heuristic model for writers by W. Ross Winterowd (Chapter Three, The Contemporary Writer, Harcourt Brace, 1975). All these heuristic models are directed toward constructing a set of questions

based on a theoretical model of inquiry that can provide students with a practical means of developing skills and ideas within the process of composing.

A Sequence of Heuristically-Organized Questions Based on A Problem-Solving Model of Composing: This sequence of assignments uses the problem-solving model as controlling paradigm. This model is especially functional in basic writing classes because it is generally applicable to a variety of career interests and goals--for students in the natural sciences, business, and social sciences, as well as the humanities. Yet problem-solving can easily be used to examine traditionally literary and humanistic subjects and topics: literature, the visual arts, and music. Here is a simple set of questions, drawn from the research by Larson, Young, Flower and Hayes mentioned above, that will serve as the underlying heuristic model for the more specific set of assignments based on film and fiction that follows. Basically, these questions fall into four progressively-developed categories: articulating the problem by re-examining the experience, both read and perceived, that surrounds the subject; defining goals by probing the problem-solving statement for future implications; defining a procedure for evolving a solution to the problem; defining cirteria to be used in evaluating the problem.

1. What is the subject or larger category of experience surrounding the problem?
2. Is there an implicit or explicit tension or opposition in the experience surrounding the problem?
3. Can this tension, conflict, or opposition be referred to in specific terms, by reference to persons, images, or actions?

4. How might the persons, images, or actions that have been referred to in defining the conflict central to the problem be expressed in more general and abstract terms?
5. What is the problem?
6. How might the problem statement be refined, elaborated upon, expanded, or qualified, with earlier responses to questions one through four in mind?
7. Why is the problem a problem? (again, earlier questions on the experience surrounding the problem are re-probed)
8. What goals would be served in solving the problem?
9. What goals would have the highest priority in solving this problem?
10. What procedures (solutions) might attain these goals?
11. What would be the consequences of the actions prescribed by the various procedures (solutions) recommended?
12. What procedure (solution) seems to suggest the most positive consequences? Why?
13. How might the relationship between procedure (solution) and goals be evaluated?

Teachers should keep two general principles in mind as they use these questions as paradigms for writing assignments. Earlier questions provide the data for answering later questions; as a result, the composing process is truly recursive and cyclical. Questions number two, three, and four on defining the tension or conflict in the experience that surrounds the problem, for example, are reconsidered as students pose answers for questions number five, six, and seven on articulating and defining the problem. Each progressive stage of composing includes similar material reworked from different cognitive perspectives.

Secondly, teachers should remember that the way students, indeed all effective thinkers, think is by putting new information into already-defined categories. Each question in the problem-solving sequence, then, becomes a context in which basic thinking skills such as the classical topics of invention (comparison, classification, enumeration, definition, cause and effect) can be used to re-examine and re-express data drawn from an earlier analysis of experience. Another possible way of using each question to foster thinking would be to keep in mind as teachers the four, general stages of discovery as summarized by Young, Becker, and Pike in Rhetoric: Discovery and Change (pp. 73-75): preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. These stages of discovery permeate the entire problem-solving heuristic, with preparation occurring in questions one through four, incubation occurring within the pauses and hesitations that are interspersed among the various questions, illumination occurring most obviously during the answering of questions five through ten, and verification occurring as students consider consequences in questions eleven through thirteen. The following assignments are based on the short film "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." Ordering information and an abstract of the film's content appear at the end of this article.

A Sequence of Problem-Solving Writing Assignments Based on Fiction and Film:

1. Informal, short writings to help students generate a critical response to the film and story (prewriting).

   A) Go back to both the story and film (after viewing and reading it once) and select two of Paul's actions that you believe seem contradictory, at least on the surface. Write a paragraph in which you explain why these actions contradict each other. (Students might contrast, for example, Paul's "correct" answer during his geography lesson with his day-dreaming during class.)

B) You have read the story and decided that your greatest problem in making a film of this story would be to show the contrast between what is happening inside Paul while he goes through a normal day at school and home. Before you view the film, select one sequence of events in the story and write a paragraph or two in which you tell how you, as filmmaker, would mix shots of Paul's external behavior with shots depicting his thoughts and reveries. (This writing would help students define a problem in remaking the story as a filmmaker, in contrast to the first writing, which would help students define Paul's problem as a character within the story.)

C) Part two of the printed story describes what Paul sees as he walks home: "stones...twigs...wooden palings...dirty sparrows... a torn and dirty newspaper scrap...little deltas of filth..." How are these elements of everyday life related to Paul's fantasy life? Are they in posed contrast to the snow, the shadows, the silence? Are they similar to them in Paul's mind?

These early-stage writings ask students to work toward more complete statements on two different kinds of problems: the problem within Paul as represented in the conflict between his internal and external life, the problem of presenting Paul's dilemma as storyteller and filmmaker. Middle-stage writings, in carrying the problem-solving heuristic further, would have students write a first draft of a critical response to a fully-articulated problem either internal (for example, in Paul's cahracter) or external (in the storyteller or filmmaker's representation of Paul's dilemma) to the story.

2. Completed first drafts based on the informal paragraphs in which a more elaborate statement of the problem is made and a draft of the structure for the entire paper is produced (writing, or the middle stage of composing).

   A) Look back over your initial paragraphs and rework your description of conflicts in the story and film into a proposition that might serve as a thesis for a critical paper. In other words, take the tentative proposition you have already applied to one part of the story or film and try it out as a proposition defining a problem central to the entire story and film. Can you see the problem in similar terms in other parts of the story? Do you see a solution to the problem of understanding why Paul is like he is as you test your proposition out by re-analyzing the story?

   B) Once you have drafted a full statement of your proposition and expanded, refined, or qualified it by rechecking the story, you should write a note to your teacher in which you explain how your proposition and the evidence behind it will help solve the problem of how to interpret Paul's dilemma. In your note, be sure to mention how the evidence you draw from the story fits into patterns of contrast and similarity. (Students at this point will be using some of the classical topics--comparison, classification, enumeration, logical reasoning--to find relationships between their completed propositions and the data that will be used to support them.)

C) Now reconsider both completed propositions (or hypotheses) and patterns of evidence from the story from the perspective of another reader or viewer. Does this second respondent find logical problems in the proposition itself? Does the evidence you have assembled help this second respondent to understand your proposition? Does it make your respondent more sceptical because he or she feels you have ignored pertinent facts? Write a note to yourself in which you summarize your respondent's reactions with your proposition and its evidence. Can you think of a form for your completed essay that would help you respond to these reactions? Might you, for example, use a comparative structure to set off your interpretation of certain actions or images with your co-respondent's? Also what piece of textual reference best suits your proposition? Where should you place it in your essay? Where should you place your proposition, considering your respondent's reaction to it?

3. Rewritings that are based on the writer's consideration of subject (proposition and evidence) and audience (co-respondent's criticisms).

A) Look back over your first draft and outline it according to the pattern you hoped to follow. Take the outline and question it. Does your draft complete the pattern? Are the general parts of the pattern (for example, the equal sides of a comparative proposition) fully developed by examples and details? Are the parts clearly related <u>on paper</u>?

B) Study your rough draft and the outline built from it and propose at least two opposing arguments. Write an informal,

short paper in which you go back over your earlier writings on specific actions, images, or techniques and tell how they might be used to develop these opposing arguments.

C) Use the detailed outline and the short paper on opposing arguments as tools in doing a final draft of your original essay.

These writing assignments are not in themselves original or superior to others; rather, they are original in the way that they follow a line of inquiry from one related stage to another, bringing the student from applications of skills as tools in developing interim writings to a more holistic application of skills in final drafting. They are, in effect, tentative steps toward the full statement of an idea.

In sequencing these assignments the set of problem-solving questions serves as an implicit guide. Prewritings become means to the end of problem-definition within the context of story and film; writing and first draftings become the means to the end of complete problem articulation and the beginnings of considerations of form in relation to audience; rewriting and revising become the means to the end of considering the consequences of the proposed solution--the structure and content of the first draft and subsequent outline, in other words, are compared to other possible interpretations (solutions) of the story and film's meaning. Problem-solving becomes the particular method of inquiry directing the student's thinking, analyzing, and writing.

Finally, it is important to say that any heuristic, carefully and creatively used, has the advantage of producing a sequence of writings that grow more naturally than most traditional assignments out of the four, general stages of intellectual discovery that we mentioned earlier. Preparation occurs naturally in earlier, more tentative prewritings; verification occurs most explicitily during the writing and rewriting stages; illumination most logically would occur

as the writer moved from prewritings to a reshaping and expanding of a proposition; incubation occurs while students are reconsidering data in relation to propositions and while the writer interacts with a co-respondent during the writing or middle stages of composing. Teaching writing using a heuristic model such as problem-solving, then, becomes a way of including these natural stages of thought in the writing process.

Ordering Information and Supplementary Materials for "Silent Snow, Secret Snow":

Available for inexpensive rental from CCM Films, Inc., 34 MacQuesteon Parkway, Mount Vernon, New York 10550; Film Center, Inc., 20 East Huron St., Chicago, Ill. 60611; Western Cinema Guild, Inc., 144 Kearny St., San Francisco, Calif. 94108. Gerald R. Barrett and Thomas L. Erskine have also published a casebook collection of the printed story, criticism of the story, a shot analysis of the film, and criticism of the film in From Fiction to Film: Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," Dickenson Publishing Company, Encino, California, (91316), 1972.

Abstract of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow":

"Silent Snow, Secret Snow" is the story of Paul Hasleman, a neurotic young boy of eleven or twelve years who is experiencing the final stages of the process of complete withdrawal from the "real" world of parents, home, and school. Both story and film are narrated from Paul's viewpoint as he fantasizes about an imaginary, secret, and silent snow that gradually envelopes him as the story progresses. Slowly Paul's alienation from all that is familiar in his life and his withdrawal into a sleep-like world of whispering shadows and velvety snow results in overt conflict with parents and teacher. As the story closes,

Paul rejects his home, neighborhood, father and mother and retracts into an autistic isolation in his snow-filled bedroom. The story's setting intersperses four related scenes in subjective time-sequence: Paul at home dressing, eating, and listening for the postman before going to school; Paul at school sitting through a geography lesson that triggers his imagination by mentioning the Artic cold and its snows; Paul at home experiencing a physical examination that, in turn, triggers his final rejection of his parents and their domestic world.